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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2932
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3011
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5277
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2876
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3521
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3597
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000720

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP, ECA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MEDIA REACTION ON MAY POST EVENTS

REF: (A) ASHGABAT 562 (B) ASHGABAT 518

ASHGABAT 00000720 001.3 OF 003

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: Embassy Ashgabat maintained a high profile in state media during the month of May. Post organized events such as USAID's 15th anniversary celebration of partnership with Turkmenistan in early May, a one-week tour of the U.S. Air Force band "Mirage," and USAID-sponsored study tours to Kazakhstan and the U.S. received generally accurate and positive media coverage. The Fifth Annual Fulbright conference in mid-May, sponsored by the Embassy, received positive and accurate coverage in state media, but also saw inaccurate and misleading stories on non-state websites. Other programs and media opportunities for the Embassy received positive coverage as well. END SUMMARY.

USAID'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY IN TURKMENISTAN

13. (U) On May 6, the government-run website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English) and Azeri News agency "Trend" (Russian), based on Embassy handouts and press release, carried accurate stories on the 15th anniversary celebration of USAID's work in Turkmenistan. The same day, "Watan" TV evening news program (Turkmen) reported on the event. No video followed. The following day, state-run dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) ran the "Turkmenistan Golden Age" story and Turkish newspaper "Zaman-International's" Turkmenistan edition (Turkmen, circ. 34,100) highlighted the event. Russia based pro-government website "Turkmenistan.ru" (Russian, English) and independent news website www.turkmeninform.com (Russian) posted accurate articles on the event based on state media reports. Russian "RIA OREANDA" (English) May 8 article reprinted the state-run daily story and "Asia-PLUS Daily Blitz" (English) reprinted the story from

"Turkmenistan.ru". On May 11, state "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabic, Persian, French) carried an accurate ten minute story highlighting the event. The story included a video of the event and accurate interview remarks by U.S. Charge d'Affaires, USAID Acting Regional Director, as well as USAID's Country Director. On May 18, "The Times of Central Asia" (English) ran an accurate article based on the Embassy press release.

ANNUAL FULBRIGHT CONFERENCE IN ASHGABAT

14. (U) On May 16, the government-run website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English) posted an accurate article on the 5th International Fulbright conference, which was the first ever to be jointly organized with Turkmenistan's Supreme Council for Science and Technology (SCST). The article emphasized active participation of foreign and state scholars in the conference, and carried accurate quotes by U.S. Charge d'Affaires from the opening ceremony. The same day, "Watan" TV evening news program (Turkmen) also carried an accurate short story on the event. The "Turkmenistan Golden Age" article appeared on state-run dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) on May 18. On May 19, state newspaper "Ashgabat" (Turkmen, circ. 23,091), based on state daily stories, ran a short article on the event.

15. (U) On May 17, the hourly news program of "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabic, Persian, French) carried a short, accurate story on the Fulbright conference. On May 19,

ASHGABAT 00000720 002.2 OF 003

the same TV channel carried a separate longer story about the conference. The program carried accurate interview remarks by U.S. Charge d'Affaires, Public Affairs Officer, and participating scholars from the U.S., Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan. On May 23, Turkish newspaper "Zaman-International's" Turkmenistan edition (Turkmen, circ. 34,100) ran an accurate article on the conference, also using the Embassy-provided information and photos. On May 21, Russian news agency "Ejednevnye novosti - Energetika i energoresursy Ukrainy i SNG" also posted an accurate article on the event.

WEBSITES DISTORT FULBRIGHT CONFERENCE

16. (U) On May 24, the opposition website "Chronicle of Turkmenistan" (www.chrono-tm.org) (Russian, English) posted an inaccurate story on the Fulbright conference, accusing the U.S. Embassy of preventing journalists from participating in the conference. In fact, the Public Affairs Section invited many working-level journalists, both state and foreign stringers, to the event, resulting in the coverage noted above. In the past, the website had carried responses from the PAO which corrected inaccuracies. However, in this case "Chronika" ignored two submissions by PAO which sought to correct the record.

17. (SBU) On or about May 27, "IWPR" (International War and Peace Reporting) posted a similar article accusing Turkmenistan's SCST of forbidding journalists at the joint conference. The "CA-NEWS" website (Russian) re-posted the same IWPR article on May 27. "IWPR" removed the article without explanation soon after receiving a response from PAO correcting the story's inaccuracies. (NOTE: PAO later met with the IWPR correspondent who reported on the conference. Septel. END NOTE)

MEDIA COVERAGE OF U.S. AIR FORCE BAND TOUR TO TURKMENISTAN

¶8. (U) On May 6, "Turkmenistan" TV channel carried accurate coverage on the public performance in Ashgabat by the U.S. Air Force band "Mirage." The program praised the concert as a sign of growing Turkmen-American cultural dialogue, and carried accurate interview remarks by U.S. Embassy officials and "Mirage" band members. On May 11, "States News Service" (English) posted an accurate lengthy article on the "Mirage" music tour of Turkmenistan, describing its public performances throughout the country. The article praised the role of music in uniting two different cultures by citing the examples of joint performances by American and Turkmen military bands.

UNIVERSITY WEBSITE HIGHLIGHTS TV CREW VISIT TO TEXAS
UNDER TV CO-OP PROGRAM

¶9. (U) On May 5, the U.S. website "Texas A&M The Battalion - College Station, TX, USA" posted a long article, accurately highlighting the visit by a TV crew from Turkmenistan under the State Department's TV CO-OP project. The crew toured the university in early April. The story in particular emphasized the importance of U.S. experience for the TV crew and praised their visit to the university.

RFE/RL ARTICLE ON USCIRF TURKMENISTAN REPORT

¶10. (U) On May 5, the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website posted an article noting that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom had urged Washington to appoint a U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan. The story accurately carried PAO's remarks that human rights issues are regularly discussed with Turkmenistan's

ASHGABAT 00000720 003 OF 003

Government.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT USAID-FUNDED TOURS OF TURKMEN
REPRESENTATIVES

¶11. (U) On May 19, Kazakh News agency "KZ Press-Club" (Kazakh) carried an accurate story on a study tour by Turkmen media specialists to Kazakhstan, organized within the joint project from USAID and the "Internews Network." The article emphasized the significance of the tour for Turkmen specialists to get acquainted with the media environment in Kazakhstan.

¶12. (U) On May 21, the "U.S. Fed News" (English) posted an accurate article on the USAID-funded tour for Turkmen governmental delegation to the U.S. under the Local Governance program. The story highlighted the goal of the program to promote professional dialogue between government officials of Turkmenistan and the United States.

OPPOSITION WEBSITE GIVES "BIO" ON POST'S CHARGE
D'AFFAIRES

¶13. (U) On May 28, the opposition website "Gundogar" (Russian) posted a lengthy unsolicited article about the career of the U.S. Charge d'Affaires to Turkmenistan, Ambassador Richard Miles. The article highlighted Miles' diplomatic career, with an emphasis on his presence or role in "revolutions" in Yugoslavia, Georgia and Ukraine, and praised Ambassador Miles as a supporter of democracy. (NOTE: There is no link to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, but Post determined that there was no need for a response. END NOTE.)

STATE TV CHANNELS CARRY PAO'S REMARKS ON TURKMEN CARPET
HOLIDAY

¶14. (U) On May 30, "Altyn Asyr" TV channel's (Turkmen) afternoon broadcast carried a congratulatory message on

Turkmenistan's national carpet holiday by PAO. Later in the day, "Miras" TV channel (Turkmen) also carried an accurate message by PAO from the event. Both interviews emphasized Americans' respect for Turkmen carpets and one included PAO's comments about the Turkmen carpet located in the Foreign Service Institute's main lobby.

¶15. COMMENT: During the month of May, Post continued to work in conjunction with state and foreign media to cover U.S. Embassy events and visits and often took advantage of targets of opportunity with state media. At key events, PAS staff noted the collegial, open approach of state and non-state media with each other and with the Embassy staff. This represents continued openness and improvement in a tightly controlled media environment, even though there has been little concrete reform in the field of media. On a less positive note, post was disappointed that opposition and even US-funded media (IWPR) carried inaccurate stories on the Fulbright Conference (paras. 6 and 7). Ironically, state media provided more accurate coverage of the same event, pro-Turkmen government spin notwithstanding.

MILES